UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social
Council

Distr
GENERAL

E/CN.4/2000/SR.8
6 April 2000

Original: ENGLISH

COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

Fifty-sixth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 8th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Friday, 24 March 2000, at 10.30 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. SIMKHADA (Nepal)

CONTENTS

RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND ALL FORMS OF DSCRIMINATION

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE ORGANIZATION OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE

STATEMENT BY THE VICE-PRESIDENT OF COSTA RICA

STATEMENT BY THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL OF ZAMBIA

This record is subject to correction.

Corrections should be submitted in one of the working languages. They should be set forth in a memorandum and also incorporated in a copy of the record. They should be sent within one week of the date of this document to the Official Records Editing Section, room E.4108, Palais des Nations, Geneva.

Any corrections to the records of the public meetings of the Commission at this session will be consolidated in a single corrigendum, to be issued shortly after the end of the session.

GE.00-12048 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.40 a.m.

RACISM, RACIAL DISCRIMINATION, XENOPHOBIA AND ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION (agenda item 6) (E/CN.4/2000/15, 16 and Add.1, 17 and 134; E/CN.4/2000/NGO/18, 28, 30, 53, 69, 102 and 122; E/CN.4/Sub.2/1999/7 and Add.1 and 8; A/54/347)

1. Ms. FAY (International Save the Children Alliance) said that many Roma, Gypsy and Traveller children were denied the opportunity of reaching their full potential because of the discriminatory treatment they received in many European education systems, in violation of article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, article 13 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and articles 28 and 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The tendency to segregate Roma, Gypsy and Traveller children in special classes or even in schools for the mentally or physically disabled was particularly damaging.

2. Negative stereotypes of Roma and Gypsy attitudes towards education persisted. Studies suggested that, given a supportive environment, such children were no less motivated than others. Pre-school education provision was critical to children from mobile families, who were likely to start school at a disadvantage. In Western Europe, many stopping places were unhealthy or dangerous, and regular eviction made school attendance difficult.

3. Her organization recommended that Governments should take specific steps to guarantee the rights of such minority children, in particular with regard to learning their mother tongue, their culture and their history, and to ensure that children from mobile families did not suffer discrimination and enjoyed true equality of opportunity.

4. Mr. ABRIL (Lutheran World Federation) said that, in the case of a significant proportion of humanity, caste-based discrimination was an obstacle to enjoyment of human rights. The Dalits of South Asia were the most obvious example. Despite the abolition of "untouchability" under the Indian Constitution of 1950 and subsequent legislative measures, Dalits continued to suffer social disabilities by virtue of their birth. They were forced to perform the most menial tasks, deprived of land and subjected to debt bondage and exploitation. Reports of violence against Dalit individuals and communities were on the rise. Dalit women suffered threefold discrimination, on grounds of caste, class and gender, and were often the targets of sexual and other abuse.

5. The Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination had ruled that the word "descent" in article 1 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination included scheduled castes and tribes. He hoped that the forthcoming World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance would redress the relative lack of attention hitherto paid to the question of caste-based discrimination.

6. Mr. OULD OTHMAN (Agir Ensemble pour les Droits de l'Homme) said that the Commission's attention had frequently been drawn to the victims of ethnic discrimination in Mauritania. In 1989, tens of thousands of black Africans there had been stripped of their citizenship and property and expelled to Senegal or Mali. Hundreds of them had been victims of extrajudicial executions or torture by the Mauritanian State security forces. Many were still

living in camps for displaced persons; one group of persons who had been helped to return to their country by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) had been unable to regain their citizenship. Later, members of the armed forces had also been targeted: more than 500 had been assassinated and hundreds of others tortured.

7. Most importantly, all the perpetrators had been identified, yet, with one exception, who was being prosecuted in France, all had thus far escaped punishment and even trial, having been granted amnesty in 1993. The Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment was inadequate to deal with what amounted to a crime against humanity, and one that appeared to have been committed with the connivance of the current Head of State. His organization would like to hear the response of the Government of Mauritania to his comments.

8. Mr. PERERA (World Federation of United Nations Associations) said that the forthcoming World Conference was an indictment of the indifference of Member States to their obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Only about one fifth of the States parties had made the declaration under article 14 recognizing the competence of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination to receive communications from individuals or groups claiming to be victims of a violation of the rights guaranteed by the Convention.

9. His organization believed that education was the key to the elimination of racial discrimination. The 1978 UNESCO Declaration on Race and Racial Prejudice stressed the importance of education in combating prejudice. It went further than the Convention by attaching the responsibility for that education to the entire teaching profession. He wondered whether teachers' organizations were aware of that responsibility. He urged the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) and UNESCO to reach out to the teaching profession to ensure that such education was carried out, and called on the Canadian and Scandinavian aid agencies to give grants to teachers' organizations to ensure that their programmes emphasized the elimination of racism and racial discrimination.

10. Ms. ATTARDO (Minority Rights Group) said that the celebrations marking the five hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the Portuguese in Brazil should also recognize and celebrate the peoples of African descent in that country. Long-held ideas of Brazil as a "racial democracy" hid the structural inequalities faced by Afro-Brazilians. The pervasive social hierarchy based on skin pigmentation remained prevalent in modern Brazil.

11. Afro-Brazilians ranked at the bottom of social and economic indicators: they had lower incomes, lived in poorer conditions and died earlier than white Brazilians; their infant mortality rate was much higher than that of the white population; their literacy rate was low; very few of them engaged in higher education; they were disproportionately affected by unemployment and were seriously under-represented in positions of responsibility.

12. Afro-Brazilians were disproportionately the victims of institutional violence and discrimination. They were more likely to receive prison sentences than white Brazilians, while Afro-Brazilian street children were often victims of serious violence.

13. Afro-Brazilian women faced specific challenges. In addition to their lower earning power and fewer education opportunities, they were often faced with entrenched sexual stereotyping and were relegated to subservient positions.

14. Although Afro-Brazilians had made significant inroads in the political arena since the 1980s, new strategies were urgently needed. The new democratic structures in the country had begun to tackle the problem. The Fundacão Cultural Palmares, which formed part of the Ministry of Culture, had been pivotal in promoting Afro-Brazilian rights. The Brazilian Government should, however, take urgent steps to give Afro-Brazilians greater access to employment, land tenure and educational opportunities, thus meeting its constitutional and international legal obligations, and should celebrate Brazil's 500 years of cultural diversity with a detailed action plan to redress historic racism.

15. Mr. KIRKYACHARIAN (Movement against Racism and for Friendship among Peoples) said that fine sentiments and even individual acts of solidarity were not sufficient for the elimination of racism; it was a matter for the citizens of a country as a whole and therefore for the State which represented them. Above all it was a question of political will. The shock caused by the publication of the annual report of the French Human Rights Advisory Commission might prove to be salutary in that regard. It had emerged that, while a majority of French people acknowledged having racist ideas or reactions, an even greater majority rejected discriminatory practices.

16. There were a number of factors tending to strengthen racism in Europe and in North America. A major one was the rise of ethnic feelings, which often led to terrible local conflicts. Because the causes of such conflicts were difficult to understand, the outside observer's natural reaction was to assume that nothing could be done and that ethnic or nationalist hatred was inevitable.

17. That reaction, however, led to various forms of ghettoization. Foreigners were denied citizens' rights, particularly the right to vote in local elections, with the result that young people born of immigrant families felt excluded from the life of the community. Public opinion in some countries might not yet allow such people the right to citizenship, but it would be both just and politic to allow all residents, without delay, the right to vote in regional and local elections.

18. Ms. JUSUI (Society for Threatened Peoples) said that, over the past 35 years, many minorities in Indonesia had faced racism and discrimination on the basis of at least 62 items of legislation regulating various aspects of religion, the economy, education, custom and culture. It was a welcome development that one such regulation had recently been repealed by presidential decree.

19. Racial divisions in Indonesian society were based on an officially supported stigmatization of ethnic Chinese. Some laws specifically targeted ethnic Chinese and, as a result, racial violence had become a common phenomenon. In 1998, women of Chinese descent had been raped and other members of the Chinese community assaulted or murdered. More recently mass killings had occurred in Maluku between civilians belonging to two different religious groups. The military had failed to give protection to the victims, especially those of Chinese origin, and there had been no serious prosecutions for racial crimes.

20. Religious affairs were highly regulated. Only five religions were officially recognized and legally accommodated: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism, Hinduism and Buddhism. Thus Confucianism, for example, was seen as undeserving of official recognition. Mixed marriages between people of different religions were restricted. Not surprisingly, such policies had led to riots and atrocities, including warfare between religious groups, mass killings of civilians of a certain religion and the destruction of places of worship. Some riots had seemed well organized while others had occurred spontaneously.

21. Her organization urged the Commission and OHCHR to exert pressure on the Indonesian Government to fulfil its obligations under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and enact legislation to protect all Indonesian citizens from every form of discrimination. Specific attention should be given to the prevention of racial conflict and the prosecution of those responsible for such conflict.

22. Ms. SAYERS (Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University) said that people were conditioned to judge others according to their outward appearance, culture and language. The world was thus currently divided on the basis of race, creed, nation, sex, age and social status. Those divisions caused conflict as people sought to defend their own territory, be it a job, social standing, a family name or a nation. The insecurity caused by such limited awareness was the prime ingredient of racism and discrimination. Removing the glasses through which one had learned to view the world required effort and understanding; but that had to be done if the foundations for a culture of peace were to be laid.

23. All human beings had the same blood, sweat and tears, and it was the soul, which housed a person's values and aspirations. In many traditions, a distinction was made between the perishable matter of the body and the non-physical, eternal nature of the inner being or soul. It was the belief of the Brahma Kumaris that every human being possessed the positive qualities necessary for harmonious relationships. The extent to which people were in touch with those qualities determined how they felt about themselves and others.

24. Indeed, it was those common human values which gave rise to the universal rights enshrined in the Declaration on Human Rights, values which were, however, less easily translated into action. Given that it was people's awareness of their common spirituality which could empower them to transcend the barriers which divided them, it was important to focus on what was shared in common while valuing mankind's rich diversity ...

25. The CHAIRMAN said that the speaker had exhausted her allotted time.

26. Mr. WAREHAM (International Association Against Torture) recalled that, at the fifty-fifth session of the Commission, there had been general disbelief that an unarmed Guinean immigrant, Amadou Diallo, could possibly have been shot 41 times by four New York City police officers. On 25 February 2000, the four members of the Diallo death squad had been acquitted of all the criminal charges against them, a result that was no surprise for people of African descent in the United States, since policemen were rarely prosecuted there for murdering black people and were hardly ever convicted. There had been several other similar cases since that acquittal.

27. In the latest case, one week previously, a certain Patrick Dorismond, a black man of Haitian origin, had been shot to death by three undercover policemen. The Mayor of New York City had unlawfully released sealed records of a juvenile offence committed by Dorismond, reinforcing the racist stereotype that all young black men were criminals and therefore deserving of police mistreatment.

28. The United States, the world's self-proclaimed leader in human rights, might have been expected to take the lead in promoting the forthcoming World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, particularly in light of the "honeyed words" so recently spoken by the Secretary of State. However, despite the efforts of his own organization to publicize the Conference, nobody at the grass-roots level in the United States knew anything about it. If the United States Government was sincere in desiring the success of the World Conference, it would hold a national preparatory conference.

29. That Government was actively involved in seeking compensation for the victims of Nazi Germany but a different standard was applied to the descendants of former slaves who continued to be victims of racism. The African Group Resolution declaring the transatlantic slave trade to have been a crime against humanity should form part of the outcome of the World Conference.

30. Mr. KOH (United States of America) said that his Government did not tolerate racial or ethnic discrimination at any level or in any form. While no nation could claim to have overcome such problems entirely, experience had shown that progress in dealing with racism was possible with time and could contribute significantly to the growth of democracy and civil society. His delegation looked forward to participating fully in the preparations for the World Conference and to contributing from its experience in dealing with racism.

31. Although his country had been founded on the vision of universal human rights articulated in the Declaration of Independence and on the conviction that all men were created equal, wars had been conducted against Native Americans and the horrendous practice of slavery had been tolerated. It had taken well over a century to build a legal base upon which African Americans and other minorities could effectively defend their civil rights. Progress in acknowledging that Native Americans deserved control over their own affairs had been slow and painful, but had led to fundamental change. A new budget currently sought to address poverty on federal reservations.

32. As for African-Americans, the effects of racism could still be seen in the lingering - albeit diminishing - disparities between blacks and whites in terms of income levels, education, health care and incarceration rates. A similar process had taken place with respect to the many other minority and ethnic groups that had come to the United States seeking the freedom and opportunity they lacked at home.

33. Admittedly, not every newcomer had been met with open arms. At different times, various non-white ethnic groups had been explicitly barred from entry to the United States. As an Asian-American child of first-generation immigrants, he had personally encountered misunderstanding and bias. His parents, like others before them, had, however, chosen to remain in the United States, since it was there that their most cherished values were honoured. They had seen the United States as a land of opportunity and promise, where the child of first-generation

immigrants could grow up to become Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights, or even Secretary of State. Such was the nature of United States democracy: a polity challenged by the dream of human rights for all and equal protection under the law.

34. The United States was one of the most racially and ethnically diverse nations in the world. His compatriots were proud of their diversity, but acknowledged that they had a long way to travel before they could create a totally colour-blind society. The nation had, however, learned that people of all races and ethnic origins deserved the legal protection on which adherence to international human rights law depended. Indeed, the civil rights movement had succeeded because people had united forces to demand justice and equality. Constitutional and legal guarantees currently afforded every United States citizen, irrespective of race, religion or ethnic background, the most extensive set of protections in the world. Racial and ethnic discrimination was prohibited, inter alia, in housing, employment, education and voting.

35. President Clinton had prioritized issues of racial diversity and equal opportunity. The year 1997 had seen the establishment of the President's Initiative on Race, a national education effort to encourage a country-wide dialogue. The following year had seen the launching of the White House Office on the President's Initiative for One America. Legal protections against all forms of discrimination continued to be improved, with discrimination based on sexual orientation having been barred in the federal workplace and recent legislation introduced to target the perpetrators of hate crimes.

36. Such work had the support of a vibrant civil society, which was free to criticize the Government and to mobilize its resources to influence the political, social and judicial levers of society. Such was democracy in action. The United States was willing to work with other Member States towards eliminating racism and discrimination in all its forms. Progress was indeed possible, and tolerance could be sustained through a transnational network of public and private actors to promote human rights.

37. Mr. WANG Min (China) said that racism was one of the most serious violations of human rights. With the abolition of apartheid in South Africa, the worldwide struggle against racism had scored a great victory. However, in an increasingly globalized world, the long-standing problem of racism was only worsening. The World Conference to be held the following year in South Africa was thus most timely and would play an important role in increasing global awareness of this issue.

38. All countries had an obligation to strengthen education in human rights, particularly on racial equality, and to improve the relevant legislation. It was also necessary to promote the establishment of an equitable international political and economic order, and to abide by the principle of equality among all countries, regardless of their size and level of development. Only then could racism be eradicated.

39. In view of the alarming rise of neo-fascism and neo-nazism in the developed countries, the latter should take urgent measures to investigate racist acts and nip racism in the bud. In spite of its long-standing domestic problems of discrimination against black and coloured people,

a certain country was always keen to point the finger elsewhere and to accuse other countries of violating human rights. Such double standards were wholly unacceptable to the international community.

40. As the preparatory committee for the World Conference, the Commission should conduct comprehensive discussions on relevant issues - such as the formulation of the agenda and outcome documents - and make specific, action-oriented proposals. OHCHR should provide adequate human, material and financial resources to ensure the smooth convening of the Conference. It was to be hoped that relevant departments would be able to fulfil their responsibilities in earnest and ensure that the preparatory work bore fruit.

41. As the Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination drew to its close, many people were still subjected to various forms of racial discrimination. At the World Conference, the international community should therefore make an objective assessment of past experience and take practical steps to realize the objectives of the Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination.

42. Ms. JANJUA (Pakistan) said that, even after the demise of the apartheid system, racial discrimination and xenophobia continued to be of extreme concern. Despite rising education, increasing globalization and developments in the field of human rights, those phenomena were making a comeback. In developing countries, human rights violations could sometimes be ascribed to low levels of education, lack of awareness and obsolete cultural and social mores. The resurgence of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia in countries which appeared to be in the forefront of the human rights campaign seemed to suggest that something more insidious and dangerous was at the root of racism.

43. It was all too easy for unscrupulous politicians to resort to racism to win power. Behind the euphemisms of ensuring the cultural identity of nations or maintaining their homogeneity lay the more sinister forces of racism and xenophobia. In a country near her own, a fundamentalist and fascist party had been catapulted to power, its popularity generated by fanning hatred of minority (Muslim and Christian) religions and suppressing lower castes. Some of the most prominent members of that party were unabashed admirers of Nazi policies and practices.

44. Islam and its followers had become the targets for xenophobic acts as a result of a deliberate attempt to depict Islam as an ideology which ran counter to human rights. Certain countries guilty of foreign occupation and denial of the right to self-determination of peoples were actively promoting such a trend by depicting freedom fighters as terrorists merely because they were Muslims. Slanderous expressions such as "Islamic terrorism" had even echoed within the Commission. No other religion had been accorded that dubious distinction.

45. Islam, like any religion, had its share of malcontents and extremist fringe elements. However, to portray the religion and its 1 billion adherents as the source of terrorism reflected a dangerous intolerance which was nothing short of racism. Tolerance, indeed, was a basic element of Islamic teaching and practice. As the Prophet had said, all mankind issued from Adam and Eve, and no race had superiority over another except by piety and good action. There could be no clearer refutation of the concept of racism.

46. Her delegation had read with interest the reports under agenda item 6. While appreciating the difficulties faced by the Secretariat, it deplored the lateness in issuing the documentation concerned which could not but hamper the discussion.

47. One of the primary tasks of the World Conference must be to devise ways and means of nipping in the bud nascent trends in racism and xenophobia. It would also be necessary to deal with racist practices which had not as yet been addressed. The practice of untouchability, i.e. socially excluding tens of millions merely on the basis of birth, should be tolerated no longer, particularly in so-called tolerant and pluralist democracies.

48. Mr. MAMBA (Swaziland) said that international efforts to address all forms of racial discrimination must be increased. It was to be hoped that the forthcoming World Conference would adopt effective measures for the elimination of such problems. As the High Commissioner for Human Rights had suggested, the United Nations must adopt a more proactive approach in order to ensure human rights for all. There was an urgent need to adopt such measures as support mechanisms and early-warning systems in order to prevent conflicts becoming crises.

49. While there were many areas of discrimination that should be addressed, he wished to focus on gender-based discrimination. Disparities in the education of girls and the training of women, economic, social and cultural barriers, and the denial to women of equal rights in many fields were all issues that must be addressed at the Conference if all forms of discrimination were to be eliminated.

50. The importance of the Conference could not be overemphasized: the impact of racist and discriminatory practices transcended State borders, and a global approach to dealing with the problem should be formulated. He hoped that the outcome of the Conference would include action-oriented strategies and clearly outlined follow-up mechanisms.

51. Mr. HERNANDEZ BASAVE (Mexico) said that decisive action by the international community was required to overcome racial hatred and eradicate the ignorance and prejudice which fomented racial discrimination and other forms of intolerance. No country in the world should allow such practices on any pretext, including that of freedom of expression. It was essential that all reservations to article 4 of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination should be withdrawn, if the fight against such discrimination was to be successful.

52. Urgent action was also necessary to deal with the incitements to racial hatred that were proliferating in developed countries, through such new means of mass communication as the Internet. In some cases the political will necessary to combat those grave violations of human rights was not being demonstrated.

53. The forthcoming World Conference should help the United Nations to redouble its efforts to combat all such criminal practices. A plan of action must be adopted consisting of practicable measures and the necessary funding guaranteed for its activities. The Conference should focus on the discrimination suffered by all vulnerable groups. In that connection, his delegation, which was much concerned about the rights of migrant workers, urged that one of the

priorities of the Conference should be the rapid entry into force of the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of Their Families.

54. His Government was making every effort to ensure that Mexican society enjoyed a culture of tolerance and full respect for human rights. Mexico was a party to most of the international human rights instruments and cooperated fully with the international mechanisms. His delegation intended to take an active part in the work of the forthcoming Conference, and believed that the holding of the Conference in South Africa represented a tribute to all those who had fought for the elimination of apartheid and continued to fight against racial discrimination.

55. Mr. FERNANDEZ PALACIOS (Cuba) said that the lessons of history appeared to have been forgotten: in many parts of the world, new and more sophisticated forms of racial discrimination were on the increase and in the developed world in particular. In Europe and North America, ultra-right and neo-fascist ideas were gaining ground, encouraged by the social crisis provoked by the liberalization of markets, the globalization of the economy and a crisis of values. Political parties with a platform of racial exclusion were increasing their support and targeting both ethnic minorities and immigrants. The international information superhighway had complicated the right against discrimination: the Internet was used to spread racial hatred. Effective action must be taken to ensure that the facility was used responsibly.

56. The most recent reports by the Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance (E/CN.4/2000/16 and Add.1) fully documented a number of those situations, the most flagrant case being, perhaps, the institutionalized racism in the United States of America, where there was a pervasive culture of massive and flagrant human rights violations. It was also clear that, in the Czech Republic, there was a growing hostility to the minorities and particularly the Gypsies.

57. He did not wish to conclude without expressing the deep concern of his delegation regarding the serious irregularities that had attended the preparation and submission of the documentation on the current agenda item. He hoped that it was not the result of a deliberate attempt to affect the quality and depth of the discussion and trusted that the Secretariat would take the appropriate steps to avoid any repetition of that situation.

58. Mr. LEGWAILA (Botswana) said that the national and international laws to discourage and punish racist crimes sometimes seemed to have the opposite intent. Many immigration and asylum laws appeared to target a particular group or race of people. Persons belonging to racial or ethnic minorities were often subjected to disturbing brutality by law-enforcement and immigration agents. Care must be taken to ensure that laws promulgated by States to protect the interests of their citizens promoted and protected the dignity of the human person regardless of race or nationality.

59. New information technology had proved a convenient vehicle for the spreading of racial hatred. While it was the right of every citizen to use the media without censorship, his delegation did not believe that legislation to ensure that the media was not used to spread messages of hate was undemocratic or that it constituted censorship. If bigots were to be defeated, every individual in society must have compassion towards and show solidarity with his

or her fellow human beings. He welcomed the decision that the forthcoming World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance would be held in South Africa.

60. Mr. HETTIARACHCHI (Sri Lanka) said that new technologies had lent themselves to new forms of human rights violations and new methods of propagating racial or ethnic hatred. In some countries, freedom of speech cloaked the use of the Internet as a tool for the promotion of all forms of racism. Advances in technology meant that the propagation of racial hatred was a real threat to multicultural tolerance and democratic pluralism, and represented an unprecedented challenge to the international community which must be urgently addressed. He therefore welcomed the attention given to the problem by the High Commissioner and the proposals she had made.

61. The forthcoming World Conference would be an opportunity to formulate new strategies to deal with racism and racial discrimination. It was therefore essential that the widest range of inputs should be drawn upon in its preparation. He hoped that the Commission would adopt a resolution inviting voluntary national substantive and resource contributions. Access to information from the Secretariat on the regional and global preparatory process would also be useful.

62. In its resolution 1999/78, the Commission had requested that financial and technical assistance be provided for the organization of regional preparatory meetings. He urged that sources of funding should be further explored in order to make such meetings a success. He welcomed the offer made by the Government of Iran to host the Asian regional meeting, and said that his delegation would do its utmost to ensure the success of the World Conference.

STATEMENT BY THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE ORGANIZATION OF THE ISLAMIC CONFERENCE

63. Mr. LARAKI (Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC)) said that, although the concept of human rights had become an integral part of Western culture, the West's perception of Islam remained a fallacious one. The reasons lay partly in past conflicts between Islam and the West, culminating in the European colonization of much of the Islamic world in the nineteenth century, and partly in the fact that the orientalists who had studied Islam had lacked scientific impartiality and presented a distorted image of the religion and the civilization, branding them as primitive and barbaric. That image had remained virtually unchanged over the last century and, despite the many efforts to explain the position of Islam on various issues, most non-Muslims were still unaware of the truth of Islam and its noble human principles.

64. Within the framework of Islamic values, the notion of equality between all human beings applied regardless of race, colour, creed or social or economic status. Islam rejected all beliefs and ideologies that glorified race or fanaticism. Relations between individuals must be based on justice and interdependence in the full meaning of those terms.

65. Human rights were part of the essence of Islam. Shariah law honoured the human being regardless of gender, religion or colour. Islam had been the first to adopt and apply the principles of human rights, and that was not surprising, since it was the only revealed religion

whose teachings guaranteed mankind a decent, dignified and stable life, with rights suitable to everyone's needs. It also detailed the consecrated rights for every human being without ambiguity and leaving no room for doubt or argument. Other communities, which had subsequently adopted the Islamic heritage, were holding up the principles Islam had originally offered as if they were a new discovery.

66. The world was full of cases of shameful violations of human rights. The Palestinians were still living the tragedy of continued violent Israeli occupation, involving loss of life, confiscation of property, the building of settlements, restrictions on freedom and aggression against the Al-Aqsa mosque, all in violation of the 1949 Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War. OIC continued to insist that that Convention should be applied in the case of the Palestinian people on the West Bank and in Al-Quds (Jerusalem). Israel continued to flout the most elementary principles of human rights.

67. The Kashmiri people were still suffering blatant violations of their basic human rights as they fought for the exercise of their legitimate right to self-determination; while in Iraq, the long-standing embargo had taken a heavy toll of victims.

68. Muslims in Chechnya were being subjected to killings, destruction and terror, while the world turned away. He reiterated the call to Russia to end the indiscriminate aggression and withdraw its forces to their initial positions so that those who had been displaced could return and the Chechen question could be settled peacefully on the basis of justice, equity, rehabilitation and the respect of cultural and social specificity.

69. It was imperative to put a stop to such blatant violations of human rights so that all could enjoy the same rights to education, health, development and welfare. Those objectives could be achieved through cooperation based on mutual respect for the cultural idiosyncrasies of each people. In that regard, OIC was actively working to prepare for the United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations, in 2001.

STATEMENT BY THE VICE-PRESIDENT OF COSTA RICA

70. Ms. ODIO BENITO (Costa Rica) said that the Commission faced the constant challenge of improving the existing human rights mechanisms. Only a respect for human rights could guarantee lasting international peace, which should be regarded as part and parcel of the Commission's work. Human rights were also an essential element in international relations, in that international harmony could exist only when life and justice, security and freedom for all were respected.

71. There could be talk of a new international order only when the international community took firm measures to ensure that human rights could be enjoyed by all. There should be real cooperation in promoting freedom, democracy, justice and peace, in line with the international human rights instruments. International harmony was essential also for attaining sustainable development and environmental protection.

72. Over the past decade, democracy had made significant advances in Central America and throughout the world. Strengthening democracy, however, was not simply a matter of holding

periodic, multi-party elections, but also of ensuring that people could live their lives with dignity, without violence, without fear or despair, in full equality of opportunity for economic progress and social development. Men and women, adults and children, citizens and non-citizens, should all enjoy the same rights. A start had been made, but it would be wrong to assume that progress would be easy. As Octavio Paz had said, strengthening democracy required imagination and courage.

73. It was important to live in accordance with the principle that every person was entitled to the enjoyment of human rights. A society could not be called just or democratic if its women did not enjoy the same esteem or opportunities as men, if children were not accorded the rights guaranteed under the Convention on the Rights of the Child or if those of a different race were discriminated against.

74. Her country had been deeply involved in many human rights initiatives within the United Nations system and at the regional level. One such had been the proposal that her delegation had put forward at the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS) in Guatemala in June 1999, entitled "Dividends for Peace", which had been adopted by consensus. Peace brought with it a security that had to be defined in terms of economics, food, education, health and the environment, with all the associated benefits and human rights accrued, including the right to development. The "Dividends for Peace" initiative aimed at freeing the resources spent on conventional arms in order to fund economic and social development and, ultimately, to strengthen democracy and peace. She hoped that the initiative could serve as a model for the international community.

75. In November 1999, her Government had started a dialogue with all the countries of the inter-American system on reforming the regional human rights regime. The aim was ultimately to establish a permanent inter-American court which would provide direct recourse for any individual whose rights had been violated.

76. Education played an essential role in developing a culture of human rights. Her Government had therefore proposed that the United Nations should dedicate a decade to the link between education and human rights. The international community must understand the importance of education as a factor of change in society.

77. It was also important to remember that, for a society to find real peace particularly after living through a terrible war, it must have available to it legal mechanisms enabling the victims to obtain justice. Impunity was the enemy of peace, both nationally and internationally. Her Government therefore supported all initiatives to establish judicial bodies that could prosecute those who had violated human rights or international humanitarian law. The Commission must strive to ensure that, in the twenty-first century, the aspirations of the past became the reality of the present.

STATEMENT BY THE ATTORNEY-GENERAL OF ZAMBIA

78. Mr. MUTALE (Zambia) said that intra-State conflicts, which were characterized by a disregard for the rule of law, tended to undermine the protection and promotion of fundamental rights and freedoms. The scenario of the twenty-first century suggested that the existing mechanisms should be reviewed and further elaborated.

79. Zambia was a State party, without any reservations to all six main United Nations human rights instruments and to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. Its Constitution enshrined the protection of fundamental rights and freedoms for the individual and provided for the establishment of an autonomous human rights commission, which had become operational with the passing of the 1996 Human Rights Commission Act.

80. The issue of foreign external debt continued to prevent the full realization of economic, social and cultural rights in the developing world, which also suffered from the negative effects of the prescribed structural adjustment programmes. Moreover, official development aid (ODA) from the developed world was decreasing. His Government had, however, put in place safety nets to meet the needs of the very poorest, by means of the Public Welfare Assistance Scheme, which provided social support (including food and clothing) and contributed to health and education costs. Other poverty alleviation programmes included food for work, the social recovery fund and Project Urban Self-Help (PUSH).

81. The Government's objective was to reduce the poverty level from 72.9 per cent to 50 per cent by 2004. Various measures had been adopted to that end. The Ministry of Community Development and Social Services had been assigned the task of coordinating all poverty interventions and spearheading the preparation of a comprehensive National Poverty Reduction Action Plan. The enhanced structure adjustment facility had been replaced by the poverty reduction and growth facility, which, along with broad-based economic growth, should significantly contribute to addressing the people's economic and social problems. Social sector expenditure was being increased, within the limits of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP).

82. The country's efforts at development had been seriously constrained by its huge external debt, which was currently just over US$ 6 billion. Servicing the debt had limited the availability of resources for development and his Government, like many others, was in favour of significant debt relief or a total write-off in order to free resources for development programmes in the health and education sectors. He therefore welcomed the visit by the Independent Expert on structural adjustment policies to identify elements to support the cancellation of Zambia's external public debt.

83. His Government commended the initiative to convene the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance. His people had fought institutional racism in colonial regimes in southern Africa in the past. Racism had no place in the current efforts to build vibrant democratic societies.

84. Like all other developing countries, Zambia was determined to promote and implement the right to development. To that end it had participated in the African Regional Seminar on the Realization of the Right to Development, which had taken place in Yaoundé in December 1999.

85. Achieving a gender balance in all spheres of life was a priority. The Government had therefore established a Gender in Development Division, under the Office of the President, to achieve a gender balance in all activities and programmes. It was also reviewing legislation in a bid to amend laws that discriminated and created imbalances. A national gender policy had just been adopted. The national educational policy recognized the need to redress gender disparities in the educational system and health reforms currently being implemented included strategies such as gender capacity-building for health providers and integrated approaches to the provision of health services, enabling individuals to access different services during one visit. Moreover, the Government had allocated to women 10 per cent of the land available for distribution, while the remaining 90 per cent was competed for equally by women and men.

86. In response to the long-standing problem of violence against women in Zambia, the Government had established a Victim Support Unit, within the Police Service, to protect the victims of such violence. Supplementing the Unit's efforts, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had introduced drop-in centres and shelters for battered women and abused children, as well as counselling services for victims and perpetrators of violence.

87. The HIV/AIDS pandemic had taken its toll of Zambia's development efforts. The social gains of the past were being eroded as HIV gained ground within the productive age group. The pressures on health providers were enormous and, owing to debt servicing, sufficient investments could not be made. The Government had taken action to establish a technical committee on natural remedies to examine and validate or otherwise the various natural remedies offered to improve the quality of life for individuals affected by HIV.

88. His Government was fully committed to the realization of all international human rights standards. It was, however, inhibited by a number of factors beyond its control, which required external intervention by those deemed to be the country's cooperating partners. There could never be full enjoyment of human rights in the midst of poverty and underdevelopment. He therefore urged the Committee to intensify its efforts to devise ways of helping countries in the South reduce poverty levels and begin to register growth.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.